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## EMPHASIS UPON TYPES IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

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The purpose of this paper is to give, in a manner as brief, concise, and plain as possible, our plan for vitalizing our teaching of English literature.

The chief feature of the plan is the placing of emphasis upon types of literature. The type connects the classic with the near-classic, the old with the new, the school with the life of every day. A play is a play, whether written by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century or by William Vaughn Moody in the twentieth century, whether produced in the Globe Theater, London, or in the Garrick, Detroit. It is impossible to keep the pupil from attending poor plays, but it is possible to help him to see that they are poor, to be dissatisfied with them, and to demand something better. We cannot keep a poor novel out of his hands, but we can show him that there are good novels, great novels; and we can help him to understand the differences between the bad and the good, the better and the best. He will read the short stories in his favorite magazine, but will he know which is good and which is a waste of his time? Not unless we help him; and this we can do by the study of types.

We hope and pray on commencement day that the boys and girls who have sat with us four or five hours each week for four years in the study of the richest language and literature the world affords will voluntarily read a few more good books before they die. If we have failed to show them that literature is a vital force, that the life of America is finding expression in current literature, and that these books of today have a very close relation to the books of past generations, those graduates will read little, and that little

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will be read without understanding and without any relation to what they have read and studied in the high school.

In Ann Arbor we connect the type plan with our study of the history of English literature during the last two years of the high-school course. When we reach that period in the history of English literature in which the life of the English people found most adequate expression through a particular type, we stop to study that type, its laws and principles and examples—examples not only of that time but of later time, including those of today. If we trace the types through the history of English literature, we come upon them in about the following order: the epic, the ballad and other brief stories in verse, the drama, the essay, the novel, the lyric poem, the short-story. Of course, many of these types are contemporaneous, and in the present day all the types, with the exception of the epic, are being produced in profusion. Besides these types of belles lettres, we note the works of many famous historians, the speeches of great orators, the treatises of learned philosophers, and the daily journals.

All the activities which we see in human life are signs, indications, or illustrations of the inner impulses, desires, and plans of man's spirit. It is equally true that each product of man's writing is a symbolic illustration or sign of an intellectual or an emotional condition, or of both. The types of literature do not differ so much in the nature of their subject-matter as they differ in their ways of presenting it. All the types are symbols or suggestions of what man has experienced in relation to other men and to the environment of man, both material and spiritual. Each type of literature differs from every other in point of view and in its plan or structure. While no serious person has ever been sure that he can make a perfect definition of any of them, yet it is possible for the high-school pupil to have a working knowledge of the laws of structure and development of each of the chief types, and to learn to appreciate the good and detect the bad.

Join one of our pupils as he approaches the study of the drama as a type. He has come in his study of the history of English literature to the age of Elizabeth, and there he finds Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and many lesser lights. He sees that a play has

structure, plot, characters, setting. His thinking is directed by questions and suggestions like these:

QUESTIONS

- Is the play just read a tragedy or a comedy? Give reasons.
- Is there a real crisis in this play?
- How is the situation made clear in the exposition?
- Is the situation tense enough to excite you at the very outset?
- Do the past events determine the trend of the action? Explain.
- Is the plot new to you?
- Are there sub-plots?
- What purposes do the sub-plots achieve?
- Has the play a real struggle? Between what forces?
- Does the struggle make the play? If not, what does?
- Is one side entirely right, the other entirely wrong? Explain fully.
- Are you pleased with the outcome of the struggle? Why?
- Did you anticipate it?
- In what other way could it end?
- What is the theme?
- Does it appeal to popular taste? Is that a good test?
- Is the theme developed simply? Could any scene be omitted?
- How has the equipment of the modern theater influenced the development of this theme?
- Are there many characters?
- How many different types of characters are represented?
- Do the characters develop, or are they simply revealed?
- Do they reveal themselves, or do others reveal them?
- Are they worth study?
- Do you know people like them?
- Where is the climax?
- Is your interest held after the climax? By what?
- Is any element of the story missing when the climax is reached? Supply it if there is.
- Does the play drop to an abrupt ending?
- What impression did you have when it was ended?
- Does that impression remain with you now?
- Would you rather see a play than read it? Why?
- Is it better to read a play before or after seeing it? Give reasons.
- Is the play worth while? What makes it so, or what lack prevents its being so?
- What was the author's purpose?
- Did he accomplish it?
- Did he write it for the "star"? Does that help or hinder, and why?

Is it a picture of real life, or is it fanciful?

Would the characters have acted in real life as they do upon the stage?

Do you want to see or read it again?

What is the best play you ever saw? Why do you choose it as the best? Who wrote it?

If it is an American play, is it truly expressive of American life?

What elements of American life find expression in it? Is it wholesome?

After the pupil has read a few plays and reviewed a few seen in the theater he is led to observe plot, character revelation and development, and setting. He notes the exposition, the exciting force, rising movement, climax, descending action, and conclusion. Men and women are revealed to him, their motives laid bare. He sometimes lives more, vicariously, in an hour than in weeks of humdrum existence. He learns that plays are written to be acted, and that involves consideration of the modern playhouse with its artistically conceived stage settings, fitting music, wonderfully manipulated lights, and facilities for the quick shifting of scenery.

The real test of the value of such a plan should be found in the answers to the questions: first, What is the pupil's attitude toward the work? secondly, What does he have as a permanent possession at the completion of the course.

This is the answer to the first question: The attitude of the pupil in the beginning is that of interest aroused by the problem which confronts him. Here is something new to him. What sort of thing is it? During the study his attitude is one of renewed surprise and satisfaction as play after play is read, each showing something new, and, at the same time, illustrating fundamental laws. At the close his attitude is usually one of regret that no more time can be taken then for reading and discussing plays.

This is the answer to the second question: His permanent possessions are some familiarity with great plays, old and new, a desire for good plays and dissatisfaction with poor plays, a fund of knowledge of structure, plot, and character development which makes him an appreciative auditor and reader, gives him greater capacity for enjoyment, and thus enriches his life. He has the training derived from practice in judging plays, good, bad, and indifferent. He is not a critic, but he is a more intelligent member

of the great mass of playgoers, who, after all, determine what shall and what shall not be played.

What has been said of the study of the drama as a type of literature may be said just as truly of almost any other type. I have used the drama simply as an illustration. It is the common fault of experimenters to exaggerate their claims of favorable results. I may have done so, but I think that I have not. I shall close this paper with the statements of some of our pupils. We asked for a frank, sincere statement of opinion and fact.

1. In each type the classical has been compared with the modern so that the literature of years ago does not seem vague and out of date, but it is connected with the literature of today.

2. In the English course which we have taken in high school we have covered the types of literature in such a concise manner that at the mention of any one of these types certain characteristics involuntarily come to our minds.

3. In recommending a book the other day I unconsciously used the points which had been emphasized in class, such as, Were the characters real? Was the problem one of everyday life? Would it stand a second reading?

4. Before I took up the study of the novel I almost detested reading a book, but now I enjoy it.

5. I think that after having studied the course in the short story I can tell, when reading one, whether or not it is any good.

6. I certainly am able to realize the work to which an author goes to write a good and successful play.

7. A silly frivolous book has no interest after reading really good novels. It is well to read a few of the silly books with the others to give a more decided contrast and show how superior a good novel is to the other class.

8. Before I entered English 8 I had absolutely no use for poetry, but now I can read it and get something out of it, a thing which I never thought would be possible.